



Belle, book, and candle.

THE SPINSTER'S LAST HOPE.

BY MRS. WALKER.

MUCH has been written, more, perhaps, than ever was felt, upon the frustration and annihilation of our first hopes. Many a goodly sonnet, with its proper quantity of lines and syllables, and *minus only*, nature, feeling, and imagery, has been thrust before the public eye, to record that life's vernal spring is not perennial, and to announce the new and interesting fact, that human existence has not changed its character since the period when it was

denounced by Job as being of "few days and full of trouble." One would have imagined, that these words, stamped as they are in the volume of eternal truth, would have availed as a beacon to guide man, and woman too, from the dark abyss of disappointment. Yet every day's experience shows us some unfortunate victim of excited expectations, blazoning forth his sorrows to the world, "in all the pomp and majesty of woe," and challenging its sympathy as loudly as if there were any novelty or distinctiveness in grief, and as if every heart that is warmed into life, numbered not the greater amount of its pulsations, by the dial of despair! But no more of this — I am a professed enemy to querulousness, and a consistent and decided opponent to sentimentality of all kinds — and maintain the possibility of living cheerfully and contentedly, even after one's *last* hope has been laid low. Such is my case; and it behoves me to introduce it, in its details.

Reader, are you of the "Beau sexe," and are you married? If so, you must remember well the throbs and anxieties, the alternations of hope and fear, during the progress of the courtship which led you to the altar. But was not the preponderating fear throughout, that some untoward accident should defeat your views, and throw you back upon society without the support of that pro-

tection which you sought to achieve, by much amiability, a little finesse, it may be, and diligent dressing? Think, then, of *her* state, who has six times been verging into the character of a wife, and at the age of forty-five, remains to sign herself a spinster! Youth is proverbially the season of enjoyment, and so I found it — eighteen years, and 20,000*l.* — fashion, vivacity, and personability — I hope the word neither compromises my truth nor my vanity — brought me plenty of admirers, and one unexceptionable offer. It was accepted; the ring was bought; the carriage ordered; the settlements adjusted; and I within a few days of white favours and St. George's church, when a brain fever — but I will not commit sentimentalism — and this passage of my life opens such avenues to it, that I would fain rush over it. Enough — my first love died: and I lived to receive, at twenty-one, my second offer, and chronicle, also, my second disappointment! My second adorer was one who, had he been like Cassio in the play, an “arithmetician,” would have divided the palm of celebrity with the American boy of calculating fame. Every act and deed was regulated with the nicest exactness, and with the sole view of adding to his fortune, subtracting from his anxieties, or dividing his cares. He lived in calculations. From the period of his making his toilet in the morning, when he

balanced for half an hour, the advantages of wearing a claret or olive surtout, till twelve at night, which found him in his legislative capacity in St. Stephen's Chapel, calculating on the propriety of voting with or against the minister.

Fatal to my hopes was this ruling passion. It was at a country ball, I was tried by this mental measurement, and found wanting. It was there he proved, that having neither the beauty of Miss L., the fortune of Miss W., or the influence of Miss M., the sum total might, after putting him in possession of a wife, leave him with a diminution of happiness and freedom. He, therefore, declared off, with all the quiet *nonchalance* possible. And the depression of the agricultural interest forming something like an excuse to my father, for the *non-ratification* of his engagement, he made his regrets and his *congé* to me, with the most serious of bows, and the deepest of sighs !

Twenty-three—found me—with my hand, small and snowy as it confessedly was, unsought for. I had gone to the expense of advertising myself, by having my portrait painted for Somerset House, and my name fully described in the catalogue. I rode through the park during the season, at the most orthodox hours, and on an unexceptionable horse. I had attended the opera as regularly as the prompter ; still it would not do ; when fate

suddenly achieved the desired good—an offer! I was on a visit at my uncle's—one of my cousins was given to music—I took the hint, and warbled at him steadily and untiringly. A new song came out—it suited my voice, and I sang it with effect—the reward was an offer to make me Mrs. Algernon Tracy. But evanescent was my triumph! The York music meeting came, and Miss —, the celebrated *prima donna*, came too. She sang my song, and without music—it was resistless—my cousin ceased his plaudits only to seek the fair vocalist, and play the inconstant to me. A few weeks after saw him married to my rival, and myself tearing the identical song into the smallest possible atoms.

Thirty—Alas! I thought, am I then really to be an old maid? I let down my hair, and it was luxuriant, without the fostering aid of *Macassar*. It told—a gentlemanly, but very bald man, asked my love, and unquestionably would have secured it, and my hand, too, had I not discovered in time, that he paid his devotions at a gambling house more punctually than to me; and that having already dispersed 30,000*l.* through the agency of “*Rouge et Noir*,” he was ready and willing to send my 20,000*l.* in pursuit after it. I thought the mission somewhat contingent as to its results, and declined his offer.

Thirty to thirty-five—I was now in a feverish state of anxiety as to the progress of the years, and began studiously to avoid all allusion to birth-days; smiled with peculiar complacency upon every person who called me ‘Miss’ at first sight; adopted all the mutabilities of fashion; accepted invitations to country seats, in good hunting counties; discoursed with the *Squirearchy* upon dogs and horses; and having, to shew my courage, and gratify the wish of one particular individual, consented to mount a horse who never would do aught but gallop (I never could do aught but trot gently); got a severe fall, and a contused head. As an indemnity for my obedience to his request, the owner of the steed began to talk of his bruised heart, and to ask me to heal it at the village church hard by. I consented—and here the destroyer of my prospects was a housekeeper—one of those middle-aged gentlewomen who exercise, in the *menage* of single men, such omnipotent mastery over their purses and persons. She knew her empire would terminate with the commencement of my reign, and persuaded Mr. Darnley that he would go to ruin, and she to the canal, if he turned his old and faithful domestic away;—*did* tears and hysterics for one whole week, and appeared, at the beginning of the next, as the mistress of Darnley Hall!

Thirty-five to forty—is a fearful age for spinsters

— offers come “like angel’s visits, few and far between.” To me they never came at all ; and I have now to narrate the climax of my fears, and the death of my hopes, which took place in the October of 1830. In an evil hour I accompanied some friends to Paris, who had given me sundry hints as to the preference the Frenchmen had for English wives. Arrived in the metropolis, many of the Parisians, with a laudable desire to give pleasure, inquired of me when I should be twenty-five ! One whose mustachios were particularly well arranged, and whose decorations were abundant, and upon whom I had begun to look with strong interest, asked me one day to accompany him to the English Ambassador’s chapel ; and whilst surveying the altar, insinuated his desire to confer upon me there the title of *Madame*. He obtained my promise ; and the next day obtained, alas ! also from me, an order upon Lafitte, which put him in possession of the whole of my property ! He quitted Paris with the avowed intent of laying out some thousands of my *francs* in the purchase of a chateau in Normandy. For any thing I know to the contrary, he may have done so ; but this I know, that I have never seen him or my money since. I lost my follies with my fortune ; I re-crossed the channel, and obtained a situation as humble companion in Lady D.’s family. And here I am,

cheerful and happy; though every chance of changing my name has vanished for ever! And "the spinster's last hope" has failed her.



Gaining a *suit*.